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ABSTRACT

Intended for teachers, administrators, and consultants, the booklet discusses purposes and objectives of teaching literature to gifted students in grades 1-3. Literature is seen as the heritage of important ideas in writing, and the purpose of the primary level gifted child's study of literature is defined as primarily the accumulation of ideas. Described is how literature can develop and clarify the student's concepts as he becomes aware of various points of view, and teach him to see relationships, make generalizations, and develop convergent thinking and understanding. Examples of how to teach children to read for ideas are given. Examined is how the study of literature develops both the communication skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and higher intellectual skills such as divergent and evaluative thinking. Study of literature is shown to also promote creativity in gifted students. Suggested reading includes books for both teachers and gifted primary children. (KW)

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# Teaching Gifted Children Literature in Grades One Through Three

CALIFORNIA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Wilson Riles — Superintendent of Public Instruction Sacramento, 1972

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GIFTED RESOURCE CENTER
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# Teaching Gifted Children Literature in Grades One Through Three

Prepared for the

DIVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
California State Department of Education

by

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
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GIFTED RESOURCE CENTER
SAN MATEO COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

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# FOREWORD

California public schools are making great efforts to provide equal educational opportunities for all children. The schools are doing this by making sure that every child is given the opportunity to profit to the full extent of his ability. This becomes possible only when the educational program offered by the schools is flexible enough to meet individual needs.

This publication, *Teaching Gifted Children Literature in Grades One Through Three,* contains information that may be used by administrators, consultants, and other professional personnel who are working with gifted children.

Literature programs for the gifted are designed to expose the gifted child to the world of ideas through literature. In addition, literature wisely selected opens the door for the gifted child to philosophy, psychology, history, drama, sociology, geography, anthropology, and possibly other fields.

In my opinion, literature is communication in its most permanent form. It involves all of the communication skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

I believe that this publication will have great value to those entrusted with the teaching of the mentally gifted.

Wilson Riles

*Superintendent of Public Instruction*

# PREFACE

This publication is one of the products of an education project authorized and funded under provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title V. It is intended for use by the teachers of pupils whose mental ability is such that they are classified as mentally gifted. It is also recommended for use by administrators, consultants, and other professional personnel involved in helping gifted children.

*Teaching Gifted Children Literature in Grades One Through Three* is one of a group of curriculum materials designed for use by teachers of the mentally gifted in grades one through three, four through six, seven and eight, and nine through twelve. These materials were prepared under the direction of Mary N. Meeker, Associate Professor of Education, and James Magary, Associate Professor of Educational Psychology, both of the University of Southern California.

Also developed as part of the education project is a series of curriculum guides for use in the teaching of mentally gifted minors in elementary and secondary schools. The guides contain practical suggestions that teachers can use to advantage in particular subject areas. These guides were prepared under the direction of John C. Gowan, Professor of Education, and Joyce Sonntag, Assistant Professor of Education, both of California State University at Northridge.

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Chapter 1

# Overview of Instruction in Literature

For the gifted child in the primary grades, literature is a time-space machine that can transport him into the past, into the future, to other lands, and into the world of fable and fantasy. Through literature the bright child can extend his own horizons. He can expand his own awareness; and he can even become, at least vicariously, someone else.

## Accumulation of Ideas

While other students are learning to read, are laboring over word-attack skills, or are even just becoming aware of the world of books, the gifted youngster, particularly the middle-class child, should be reading for ideas. He invariably comes to school able to read, familiar with the library, and ready to comprehend realms of meanings. This publication is concerned, then, with making the purpose of the gifted child's study of literature in grades one through three primarily the accumulation of ideas.

## Study of Literature

Literature is the heritage of important ideas in writing. In his early introduction to these ideas, the young child needs first of all to enjoy and appreciate them. The gifted child can be delighted by the meaning, by the way the author has chosen to express this meaning, and by the impressive fact that literature links us with other times, other countries, and other languages.

### Nongraded Matter

The subject matter here is to be nongraded. Moreover, the teacher should add, at his own discretion, his favorite selections whenever they seem to fit the occasion. The children themselves should be encouraged to share their favorites. The very fact that the children have favorite selections is evidence that they are developing enjoyment and appreciation. Grade level is the concern of the reading specialist, not of the teacher of literature, who selects reading matter as it relates to children's experiences.

### Teacher and Parental Guidance

The initial travel through the realm of literature is guided by teachers and parents. (Parent participation is encouraged as part of this curriculum.) When the child has developed enough skill in reading to travel easily through literary selections, the adults in his life, teachers or parents, can provide opportunities or suggestions. They can introduce selections they have enjoyed. But the proof of the program's success will be the child's own enthusiasm for selecting worthwhile books and enjoying them.

### Background Information

Literature is written by real people with real experiences. Young gifted children find a poem more interesting if they know, for example, that Robert Louis Stevenson wrote some of his verses while lying in a hospital bed thinking about his childhood instead of feeling sorry for himself. Sometimes his young stepson, Lloyd Osbourne, was at the poet's side, providing an enthusiastic audience. During this time, ideas seemed to flow from Stevenson's mind as fast as he could put them down on paper.

Robert Southey wrote a poem for his little boy; it was called "The Cataract at Lodore." Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote "The Children's Hour" for his daughters. Taro Yashima remembered his childhood in Japan when he wrote the story *Crow Boy*. Yashima made the teacher in the story just like a teacher he had known whose name was Takeo Isonaga. The school in the story was like the school he attended. Kipling wrote *The Jungle Book* for his daughter. In the *Just So Stories* he calls his daughter "Oh, best beloved." Some of the best books are written because an author is thinking of a particular person.

### Development of Memory

Literature is worth remembering. Children in the primary grades enjoy repetition. They ask for their favorite poems, songs, and stories over and over. Through this process they seem to memorize effortlessly. When their imagination is aroused, gifted children remember rhythms, phrases, and whole selections. The content of a poem can be figural, symbolic, semantic, and behavioral at the same time if the teacher takes time to present it in this way with pictures, words, and actions. Gifted children seem to be programmed for acting out their responses to literature.

To present a literary selection for total impact on the beginning reader, a teacher can begin with a picture, or she can use a flannel board together with appropriate materials. Then she can discuss the meaning and act out the story with rhythms or dramatic play. This approach involves the child more intimately, making a deep impression on him. At the same time the stimulation establishes the child successfully within the content of the Structure of Intellect model; i.e., figural, symbolic, semantic, and behavioral (Guilford and Merrifield, 1960).[1]



In the earliest literary works, memory played an important role. Aesop's fables were told and told again, probably for centuries, before they were recorded in writing. Some authors retold familiar stories in their own style, making some additions. Aesop's fables have been rewritten by Demetrius, Phaedrus, Babrius, and many others, including Walt Disney. Shakespeare often took old stories and retold them in his own way. Then Charles Lamb retold Shakespeare's stories in *Tales from Shakespeare*. Some familiar stories have been told by many different authors. Gifted children should be encouraged to retell stories in their own words.

## Development of Accurate Concepts

Authors express their own concepts in their writing; therefore, literature can develop and clarify the student's concepts as he becomes aware of various points of view. A teacher may discover that his students have limited or distorted concepts. When the teacher provides appropriate experiences and related literature, the children can become aware of many dimensions of a particular concept.

Recommended reading for all teachers of the gifted is *Language and Literature: The Human Connection* (Martin, 1967). A statement from the book that teachers should memorize is this: "Poems and stories are a prime source of speech models that children can imitate in exploring new patterns of language. . . ." The growth of accurate concepts is easily followed in Martin's narrative.

### Examples of Development

A parallel example can grow out of a discussion about London Bridge. This conversation took place in one class:

Teacher: "What do we see when we stand on a bridge and look down?"

Children: "Railroad cars."

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[1] In this publication, sources are given by the use of the last name(s) of the author(s) together with the year of publication. Or if a name is unavailable, the title of the source and the year of publication are given. The reader can find complete bibliographical information for each source cited in the text by referring to the list of "Selected References" in this publication.

This reply was accurate and logical, for a child. Yet the teacher recognized that the child's concept was limited and distorted. An incident like this may be the beginning of an exploration of rivers through literature. Robert Louis Stevenson's poem, which has been set to music, reads:

Dark brown is the river,
Golden is the sand,
It flows along forever,
With trees on either hand.

Other poets have described other rivers. Robert Southey used onomatopoeia and ingenious rhythm patterns to portray the feeling of the "Cataract at Lodore."

Tennyson had the brook say:

Man may come and man may go,
But I go on forever.

The song "Old Man River" gives an American version of Tennyson's idea.

Shakespeare, in *As You Like It,* had Adam remark that there were:

Books in brooks,
Sermons in stones,
And good in everything.

Samuel Clemens selected the pen name of Mark Twain from riverboat language. In *Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn,* and *Life on the Mississippi,* he drew a picture of river life from the points of view of a small boy, two runaways, and a riverboat pilot.

Not all of these references will be used for every study of rivers. But these and other references are available for gifted students who show a deeper interest. In addition, parents who ask for suggestions may be given ideas for literary experiences in the home.

### Use of File

In the classroom a file of the poems studied by the class should be available to pupils in the primary grades. The poem, typed on a primary typewriter, should be mounted on a card, and an appropriate illustration should be placed on the back of the card. Any child may select a particular poem for independent study. This resource is particularly appealing to gifted children. Only poems that have already been presented by the teacher should be filed. Poems that have been set to music should be included in the file. Songs are an important part of literature; music and poetry traditionally have been correlated.

Chapter 2

# Ideas in Literature

As gifted children develop more accurate concepts through the study of literature, they begin to see relationships and make generalizations. Through discussion, teachers can encourage these discoveries. But the children themselves, in the process of enjoying literary works, will notice certain similarities, categories, and implications. When a child makes a perceptive discovery during the discussion, the teacher should record the discovery as a generalization.

### Examples of Generalizations

Examples of such generalizations are as follows:

1. Because nursery rhymes are very old, some of them have changed meanings as they were handed down by word of mouth.
2. An individual author usually writes many books with similar characteristics; therefore, if a reader likes one of the author's books, he will probably like the others.
3. Many authors at many different times, from Aesop to Dr. Seuss, have used talking animals to teach people moral values.
4. In stories using talking animals, each animal is supposed to portray a special human characteristic, such as the sly fox, the foolish donkey, the noble lion, the cruel wolf, and the chattering monkey.

Children make even better generalizations. The teacher must listen constantly, not only in the classroom during the discussion period but at the playground and at any other place where informal conversation occurs spontaneously. Reinforcement by the teacher is needed. She can say, "That's a good idea. Let's put it on our chart." Then the children will be motivated to think of other generalizations. For the gifted child this kind of motivation is much more important than having a teacher "draw out" his own preconceived generalizations from the pupils through directive questioning.

The chart containing children's generalizations about literature should be kept in the classroom. It may be entitled "Our Ideas About Literature." The teacher should see that the chart is kept

current; it should be a continuing description of the children's increasing awareness of basic generalizations about literature.

## Development of Convergent Thinking

Generalizations are the result of convergent thinking; that is, children gather data from many sources, see relationships, and make generalizations. Teachers can set the stage for the development of generalizations by organizing the presentation of literary works in the "read-aloud" or storytelling period. A number of days can be devoted to stories about talking animals written by many different authors. Discussion of similarities and differences encourages the gifted to crystallize their ideas.

Generalizations about mythology can develop after children hear parallel concepts explained in Greek, Norse, American Indian, and Asian myths. Some of these explanations may deal with how men came to the earth, how fire was discovered by man, and what makes thunder and lightning.

A comparison of stories about mythical talking animals and stories about real animals illustrates the difference between stereotypes and generalizations. The talking animals portray stereotypes. In stories about real animals, literature brings out many qualities about these animals so that a generalization about them must recognize many dimensions.

## Development of Understanding

The study of literature involves philosophy, psychology, and sociology. The gifted child can experience vicariously the problems of the characters in the books he reads. In so doing, he may resolve some of his own frustrations. He may also step beyond his own ethnic group and dwell within the world of someone else. He may gain an understanding of problems that people face regarding, for example, personal appearance, physical handicaps, character and personality defects, unstable environment, foreign background, and frustrations.

### Sample Readings

An author has written a series of regional stories through which children may learn about life situations in various parts of the United States (Lenski, 1949). These books, which develop an understanding of life patterns, are totally unlike the "twins" series of 50 years ago in which a stereotyped boy and girl appeared in different costumes in different countries (e.g., *The Dutch Twins, The Irish Twins,* and *The Mexican Twins).*



Several bibliographies have been compiled to help teachers select books that will help to develop understanding; e.g., a bibliography entitled *Behavior Patterns in Children's Books: A Bibliography* (Kircher, 1966).

Another author has written books for readers whose reading ability is equivalent to primary, elementary, junior high school, and senior high school levels. *Reading Ladders for Human Relations* (Crosby, 1963) is much more than a bibliography. Reading Ladder I selects books that may be read by young children.

Some of the understanding developed by Crosby's reading ladders are the following:

1. How it feels to grow up
2. The individual and the group
3. The search for values
4. Feeling at home
   a. In our country
   b. In other lands
5. Living with change
6. Living as a free people

### Fact and Fantasy

The difference between fact and fantasy is an important understanding for young children. Much of children's literature belongs in the category of fantasy, even of nonsense. But to children in the primary grades, the boundary between reality and make-believe is nebulous. Did the cow jump over the moon? Will the astronauts orbit the moon? (What about the horrendous folklore of the Saturday cartoon?)

Gifted children can better understand the difference between fact and fantasy if they develop, in their study of literature, criteria for distinguishing realism from whimsy. Boys are especially likely to reject the whole field of literature if they are exposed only to fairy tales. An understanding of philosophy, psychology, and sociology may, therefore, be introduced to young children through literature. Personal problems and human relationships can be understood through the reading of properly selected books.

### Summary

Children can begin to understand the relationship between fact and fantasy through literary exploration. The intellectual curiosity characteristic of the gifted child can find some satisfaction through the vicarious experiences provided in good literature. Some of his questions may be answered through the reading of literature. But

some of the important objectives of the study of literature are to stimulate the child to ask more questions, to cause him to wonder, and to make him eager for more knowledge.

## Reading for Ideas

Ideas are the principal concern of literature programs for the gifted. At a time when the teaching of reading places so much emphasis on word-attack skills, the gifted child needs a special program that opens for him the world of ideas through literature. A great many gifted children teach themselves to read before entering school. Those who have not learned to read find motivation for learning to read through listening to oral presentations of selections from authors who increase their awareness and broaden their horizons.

Reading for ideas should be recognized as the only real reading. Books for gifted children should be selected on this basis instead of on the basis of containing basic vocabulary words constantly repeated. Because art also communicates, the illustrations in the literary selections should be colorful and creative and should reflect the mood of the story or poem.

Literature wisely selected opens the door for gifted children to philosophy, psychology, history, drama, and possibly to sociology, geography, and anthropology. The timeless ideas characteristic of literature contain elements of all those disciplines.

Ideas in literature are presented not in a stilted basic vocabulary but with the flow and rhythm of the best possible words to give many dimensions to good prose or poetry. The ideas should be so vivid that the child's mind anticipates the passages yet to come but is delighted when the author surprises him.

Literature is indeed a time-space machine that can bring to the reader the ideas and intimate thoughts of persons who lived in other centuries and on other continents. The gifted child typically becomes fascinated by the ideas of a particular author and may choose book after book written by that author.

## Method of Teaching Literature

The essential elements of teaching literature to the gifted child are (1) the ideas; (2) the flow and rhythm of good writing; (3) the personalities of the authors; and (4) the extension of new horizons. One other thing that is essential is an enthusiastic teacher who himself enjoys literature.

### Total Concept

Psychological studies and investigations of the cognitive development of children provide educators with an understanding of the manner in which a child becomes aware of one dimension and then another as he develops a total concept from the fragments of sensory stimuli. The initial stimuli in the realm of literature are the individual poems, nursery rhymes, and stories that he hears and enjoys. Early experiences in listening and appreciation should be encountered long before the first grade. But disadvantaged gifted children probably have not had these experiences. Therefore, teachers sensing alertness or awareness among pupils who have not had experiences in listening and appreciation before entering school will have to supply these experiences for these pupils.



### Impact of Poetry

The multidimensional impact of poetry has traditionally been the young child's first introduction to literature. The jingle of the nursery rhyme has provided patterns of rhythm and rhyme and, often, onomatopoeia to delight a child on a purely sensory level. Repetitious nonsense syllables aid in speech development, as in the following:

> Diddle, diddle, dumpling,
> My son John,
> Went to bed with his stockings on.

Because the nonsense syllables are related to a familiar idea, the child can enjoy the picture of a completely relaxed little boy together with the amusing syllables of the refrain.

For the gifted child the teacher should explore the possibilities of the whole range of poetry. Lewis Carroll demonstrated that ideas, emotion, and sensory delight can be communicated regardless of words, as in his "Jabberwocky":

> 'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
> Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
> All mimsy were the borogoves,
> And the mome raths outgrabe.

Alliteration as found in *Beowulf* provides a sensory stimulus when it is not tied down to footnotes and translations. Children like to listen to readings of the verse of Edgar Allan Poe because of its alliterative quality. The whole range of literature offers passages that flow gently, or roll grandly, or trip lightly.

## Levels of Enjoyment

The first level of enjoyment of literature should be sensory and emotional for any child. The adult who reads it aloud needs to enjoy it first and to transmit his enthusiasm to the gifted child.

Some very fine writing for children is being done at the present time. In writing this publication on teaching literature to the gifted

child, the author provides a bibliography with the qualification that it is incomplete. Publishers' lists should be constantly examined for additions. Antiquity has left us a legacy that can be introduced to the gifted child as long as the ideas are relevant to his daily life. For example, the ideas in the "Salutation of the Dawn," from the Sanskrit, are as fresh today as they were when first spoken:

Listen to the Exhortation of the Dawn!
Look to this Day!
For it is Life, the very Life of Life.
In its brief course lie all the
Verities and Realities of your Existence:
  The Bliss of Growth,
  The Glory of Action,
  The Splendor of Beauty,
For Yesterday is but a Dream,
And To-morrow is only a Vision.
But To-day well-lived makes
Every Yesterday a Dream of Happiness,
And every To-morrow a Vision of Hope.
Look well therefore to this Day!
Such is the Salutation of the Dawn!

The gifted child will enjoy learning that morning exercises in our school have been paralleled in many cultures, even long before there was an American flag to salute. The "Salutation of the Dawn" reached our culture from another continent. It was first composed in Sanskrit, a language no longer spoken, by a people whose history has been erased by time. But the ideas are relevant to a child just beginning to understand the meaning of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

The second level in selecting literature for any child is relevance to his world. For the gifted child, this relevance extends beyond the traditional children's books into the realm of wonder.

# Chapter 3

# Communication Skills

Literature is communication in its most permanent form. The skills discussed in this chapter are, therefore, the communication skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – as they relate to the study of literature.

## Listening Skills

Teachers must provide, for the youngest children, the initial experiences with literature through listening. Listening to literature is a responsive, participatory activity. Even the first time a story or poem is read, the teacher should elicit responses and provide for total involvement. When a favorite selection is read for a second or third time, children have a natural tendency to complete sentences, join in a refrain, or anticipate rhymes. The rich, rhythmic prose of Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories* is an irresistible invitation to the gifted child to join the teacher in saying:

The great, gray, green, greasy
Limpopo River.

Teachers will discover that children can memorize and repeat good literature just as quickly as they do television commercials if the teacher presents the literature as dramatically and as attractively.

### Sensory-Motor Experiences

Listening is a sensory delight. The sounds of the language found in literature have an intrinsic beauty. With a little encouragement the teacher can alert gifted children to watch for beautiful language patterns. Traditional nursery rhymes have been perpetuated for centuries at this sensory level, often losing their original meaning while being transmitted by word of mouth.

The foundation skills of listening can be developed through experiences with literature (Gensley, 1962). The ability to discriminate speech sounds and patterns develops through having many sensory-motor experiences. Nursery rhymes are a beginning, but for the gifted child these experiences can go much deeper. An introduction to the rich alliteration and gutteral sounds of *Beowulf* can reveal to the young gifted child the fact that the English language

has ancient origins. In the past many changes of pronunciation have occurred during oral transmission. The seeming inconsistencies of English spelling can be related to these changes in the original words.

Increased sensitivity to the environment can be developed through the selection of literature that contains onomatopoeia, such as Southey's "The Cataract at Lodore." Selections like Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" make children more aware of life and improve their command of words. In her poem Miss Rossetti wrote of "plump, unpecked cherries," of "bloom-down-cheeked peaches," and of "wild free-born cranberries." Discussions of each fruit will help to improve the vocabulary of the gifted child who is also disadvantaged. Pictures of each fruit can be collected and shown together with descriptions of taste, texture, and size.

#### Role of Music

Appreciation of stories and music is a listening skill directly related to the study of literature. Literature and music are closely related because so many poems have been set to music, thus becoming songs. The study of poetry can well begin with singing in which words of great beauty are blended with music to create moods.

#### Fact and Fiction

Distinguishing fact from fiction is a necessary skill for young children and has particular relevance for the development of memory skills, which are important for achievement. Through discussion, children also can develop criteria for evaluation.

### Speech Skills

Language patterns exist in literature in infinite variety. Through his study of literature, therefore, the young gifted child has an opportunity to increase his vocabulary, becoming fluent in speaking and in thinking.

#### Types of Skills

Speech skills have been identified as (1) competence in the use of resources inherent in the person himself; (2) competence in terms of audible codes; and (3) competence in the development of an adequate verbal message (Hance, 1951).

*Self-improvement.* The study of literature has traditionally been part of the speech program, particularly as to building the resources of the person himself. The young gifted child responds to the style of the best authors. He absorbs vocabulary spontaneously. In place of language derived from the popular media, from which children get



such phrases as "Excedrin headache" and "sock it to me," schools can provide selections from the best writers in the English language.

*Audible codes.* When the teacher reads aloud to the class, he presents a model of acceptable audible codes. When the program includes participation by the pupils, these audible codes are replicated, thus developing the child's competence. This reference to replication must not be confused with parroting. Children should be encouraged to join the teacher not only in singing but in completing parts of a story or a poem. Thereby, they develop speech skills and the creative ability called *cloture* (Torrance, 1967).

*Verbal message.* Developing an adequate verbal message becomes natural to children who have extensive experience in listening to the words of the best authors. For example, first grade students who have participated in repeating the refrain in Wanda Gág's *Millions of Cats* are often heard, while conversing informally, using the terms *hundreds, thousands, millions, billions,* and *trillions* in the correct frame of reference. Each author brings his own background and vocabulary to each of his writings unless he is trying to restrict himself to a basal word list.

The stilted phraseology of the conventional primary reading text has very little to offer gifted children in their development of an adequate verbal message. Anyone who questions this statement has only to compare the early Dr. Seuss books with his later books (which were written with a limited basal vocabulary) to recognize the emasculating effect a basal vocabulary has on the expression of ideas.

Some earlier Dr. Seuss books were *Thidwick the Moose, Horton Hatches the Egg,* and *Yertle the Turtle* – all books with ideas. In his later books, such as *The Cat in the Hat* and *Go Dog, Go,* ideas were lost in the psycholinguistic approach of an easy-to-read vocabulary. This approach may act as a straitjacket on gifted children who read for ideas. The vocabulary of the gifted child is enriched through listening to literature, and he gains a feeling for the syntax of the language.

The reader is referred to *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (Chall, 1967). The author's thorough review of experimental studies in reading shows that children with higher IQ scores learn to read better by the use of the word-recognition method whereas slower children learn better by the use of the phonetic method.

### Reading Skills

The reading skills to be developed through the study of literature pertain to receiving, understanding, developing, and transmitting ideas. Authors of good literature have created models of ways in which ideas can be expressed.

### Oral Reading

The gifted child's first acquaintance with literature begins when an adult reads to him, using tone, pitch, inflection, and enthusiasm to reveal hidden meanings in the printed words. The first introduction need not be long. In fact, when a teacher is working with children who read easily, he might read just enough aloud to excite his pupils' imagination and then say, "Who would like to borrow the book to finish the story?"

The teacher should be a model of expressive reading when he reads aloud. It is futile to direct children to "read with expression" if they have not had the opportunity to listen to someone who has this ability. The flow and rhythm of poetry should always be introduced by the teacher in an oral reading. Pupil participation can be encouraged, especially in the study of poetry, by letting children repeat refrains, conclude rhyming phrases, and read in unison as a verse choir later on.

### Selection of Literature

Another strategy for developing the concept of reading for ideas is for the teacher to select literature of special interest to a particular gifted child. "When I saw this book, I thought of you. I think you'll enjoy it," the teacher can explain. A brief discussion of important ideas is the next means of motivation. The child should be told why the ideas of this book should appeal to his particular interests. The entire approach to reading literature must be through the challenge of ideas. A "reading lesson" taught to stress mechanics should never be confused with or supplemented for the study of literature, which stresses ideas. Grade level is immaterial; interest and enthusiasm must be paramount.

Even the youngest gifted child enjoys selecting a story from the book table or from the library. Parent cooperation can be enlisted to help the child build a personal library. Parents are willing but need guidance. Some publishers offer sets of "junior classics" that are sometimes inferior in format and are of questionable value. The alert teacher can suggest titles suitable for a particular gifted pupil.

Some schools have a book fair just before Christmas at which a wide selection of books is displayed so that parents can help a child build a library of his choice.

### Summary

Gifted children in the primary grades should, in their study of literature, be able to (1) recognize the main topic or idea; (2) read silently for enjoyment; and (3) read orally to entertain others.



One author describes a book club in which small groups meet around tables and show each other books they have been reading for enjoyment (Smith, 1967). Then the group selects one book, and the child that brought it reads aloud for the others. Sometimes the book club decides on interesting ways to present the chosen book to a larger class of children. Reading orally to entertain others motivates a chain of creative responses.

## Writing Skills

Young children become aware of style through the study of literature, which provides models for discussion and comparison. Gifted children are very likely to reflect in their own creative writing some of the vocabulary of their favorite stories. They enjoy (to a limited extent) biographies of their favorite authors.

Great authors have backgrounds rich in the literature that preceded theirs. Allusions to the literature of the past are so often found in writing today that the primary grades offer good opportunities to start building this reservoir of knowledge for the gifted, some of whom may be the authors of tomorrow.

Chapter 4

# Higher Intellectual Skills

The study of ideas through literature introduces the young gifted child to concept meaning, ideational fluency, and idea selection. He can learn to sort ideas into classes.

As the gifted child listens to myths of the Greeks, of the Norsemen, of the North American Indians, and of Asian peoples, he should be encouraged to examine the relationships between stories explaining how the world began, how thunder and lightning were made, and how man learned to use fire. He may wish to invent myths of his own to explain natural phenomena in an unscientific manner.

How authors have their characters meet frustration is an idea that the gifted child may explore and evaluate. Hans Christian Andersen's story *The Ugly Duckling* is good to start with. The child may generate a system from the ideas of several authors. Then he may be encouraged to produce his own suggestions. The use of well-known classical fairy tales, folk stories, myths, and fables is recommended to help gifted children go far in creative thinking (Torrance, 1967). In addition, he recognizes the impact of the facts of nature upon a child's imagination. As we approach the twenty-first century, our understanding of reality extends far beyond the wildest flights of classical fantasies. Man flies, orbits the earth, and lands on the moon.

### Structure of Intellect Model

According to the Structure of Intellect model (Guilford, 1967), some of the higher intellectual skills involved in the study of literature are the following:

1. Divergent production
   a. Transformations of semantic content
   b. Implications of semantic content
2. Evaluation
   a. Transformations of semantic content
   b. Implications of semantic content

#### Convergent Production

Young children can be encouraged to stretch their imaginations by studying the ways in which several authors have dealt with a situation. For instance, the problem of loneliness or rejection is one





that every human being faces at some time. Gifted children are frequently aware that they are different and are often lonely. The teacher can explain these feelings as they relate to *The Ugly Duckling.* Or she can read to the class Taro Yashima's *Crow Boy* (1955) or Rosemary and Stephen Benet's "Ben Franklin" (1951), the first lines of which offer opportunities for further clarification:

> Ben Franklin munched a loaf of bread while
> Walking down the street,
> And all the Philadelphia girls tee-heed to
> See him eat.

This poem continues with Ben's many activities and in a later verse mentions that:

> Ben Franklin was the sort of man that
> People like to see.

What does this apparent inconsistency in the poem mean? This question requires convergent production of expected social solutions. Teacher and children can discuss the similarities between the story of the ugly duckling and "Ben Franklin." Can this theme be transformed into a story about school life today?

*Transformed meanings.* A comparison of English translations of poems, songs, and stories with the original versions requires an understanding of how meanings become transformed. For example, the song "Frere Jacques" reads this way in French:

> Frere Jacques, Frere Jacques,
> Dormez-vous? Dormez-vous?
> Sonnez les matines! Sonnez les matines!
> Ding! Dang! Dong! Ding! Dang! Dong!

A literal translation of the song is as follows:

> Brother James, Brother James,
> Are you sleeping? Are you sleeping?
> Ring the matin bells! Ring the matin bells!
> Ding! Dang! Dong! Ding! Dang! Dong!

Apparently, Brother James was a friar whose responsibility was to ring the church bells so that the village people would know it was time for morning prayer. In the verse someone asks him whether he has overslept and reminds him of his duty.

But the widely known English translation uses these words:

> Brother John, Brother John,
> Are you sleeping? Are you sleeping?
> Morning bells are ringing, morning bells are ringing,
> Ding! Dong! Ding! Ding! Dong! Ding!

Another interesting example of transformation is a recording by a group of modern German singers of the 1849 folk song containing these lines:

There's plenty of gold, so I've been told,
On the banks of the Sacramento.

The forty-niners were singing about panning gold on the Sacramento River. The Germans translated the lines this way:

There's plenty of gold, so I've been told,
In the bank at Sacramento

To them a bank was a building where gold was kept, and Sacramento was a city.

*Interpretation and use of profiles.* Teachers who receive Structure of Intellect profiles of their gifted students are referred to *The SOI: Its Interpretation and Use* (Meeker, 1969) for an exact definition of each ability and suggested curriculum activities.

**Divergent Thinking**

To encourage divergent thinking, a teacher can invite children to end a story differently. Whenever a decision is made by a character in a story or poem, the children can discuss what might have happened if a different choice had been made. This approach is especially appropriate to the study of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market," in which Lizzie and Laura make divergent choices.

In a unit on divergent production, the implications of each choice can be considered. Every decision, every choice has advantages and disadvantages. Young gifted children can be encouraged to think about these implications as they study literature.

**Divergent Production**

The implications of a literary work can be a challenge to a divergent thinker, especially if he is a gifted child. All kinds of questions that start with "What if" can follow the enjoyment of a story or a poem; for example:

What if Peter Cottontail had stayed at home with his sisters?
What if Betsy in *Understood Betsy* had stayed in New York instead of going to Vermont?
What if Benjamin Franklin's brother had been kind to him and had published his works?
What if people of Hamelin had paid the Piper according to their agreement?

Many possibilities become evident when the divergent thinker begins to explore implications. In every story there is a place where a



decision is made. The gifted child can use his imagination to explore the implications.

**Evaluation Techniques**

For the gifted student the conventional book report assignment should be replaced by a wide range of evaluation techniques. Book reviews, which for the young child can be oral, should include a discussion of criteria. No universally accepted list of criteria exists, just as no universally accepted list of works of literature exists. But children should begin thinking about the reasons why some writing is considered literature. Do some writers write literature while others do not? Or is anything literature as long as it is very old? Is literature a heritage? Or is it something that has been translated into many languages? Who decides which work is literature and which is not (Martin, 1967)? Debate on some of these questions leads into the next section, which includes implications.

*Discussion of style.* Style should also be integrated with this study. William Wordsworth and Robert Louis Stevenson both expressed the idea that images of beauty can be stored in the mind as a resource to be a joy forever as insurance against boredom or loneliness.

Wordsworth expressed the idea like this in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud":

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils. . . .

Stevenson, writing for a different audience and another era, used these words:

When at home alone I sit
And am very tired of it,
I have just to shut my eyes
To go sailing through the skies. . . .

*Discovery of relationships.* Gifted children characteristically look beneath the surface to discover relationships, to generalize, and to infer. The teacher can encourage this approach, first of all through discussion. Children need the experience of offering their own explanations of meanings, and teachers must take their turns as listeners. On the other hand, the child who has not had opportunity to discover relationships may need structured information on how to do so.

Another child may, on the basis of his own information, interpret a familiar tale in an entirely new context. A case in point is a gifted

boy's summary of the story of Cinderella. According to him, "Cinderella was a little girl who wanted to go to a ball game. But her mother and sisters went to the ball game and left Cinderella at home. Then the coach came along, and he took Cinderella to the ball game."

The small boy's vocabulary gave him information about the ancient tale that was not there for his teacher, who read "coach" as "carriage." More discussion helped both to evaluate the two versions of the Cinderella story as well as the happenings in this historical setting.

*Sample questions.* Some questions that may encourage children to evaluate the implications of a literary work are the following:

What do you think happened after the story ended?
How can you tell whether this really happened?
Why, because he told stories about lions, do you think Aesop was born in Asia Minor?
Why do you think Aesop told animal stories that suggested moral values to people?

### Sample Project

One group of gifted children helped evaluate and recommend new books to be purchased for the elementary school library. Of necessity, such a project is for fluent readers only. This group also wrestled with the problem of budget. Prices of the books were considered in the evaluation. Much discussion centered on getting books of the most value for children of different abilities within the limits of the budget. Through this practical project the children became aware of many dimensions of literature that they had never thought of before.

Chapter 5

# Development of Creativity

The study of literature contributes to the development of abilities in children earlier than usual. This study serves not only as motivation for creative writing but as a preliminary step to creative thinking. As the gifted child listens to the ways in which different authors use words to make their ideas sparkle, he discovers what words can do for ideas.

### Techniques of Poetry

The teacher's role in presenting this opportunity is to point out how, for example, a poet can make some parts of his poem whisper by using the right words, as in Japanese haiku. Or the teacher can explain how the rhythm of horses' hooves pounding on the pavement is achieved in another poem.

In poetry sounds are sometimes just strung together to create a mood, but in prose the author is more limited. The teacher can encourage children to experiment with words and the moods and messages imparted. An enthusiastic teacher can help to spur the imagination of her gifted pupils.

How ideas can be conveyed even through words that have no dictionary meaning is demonstrated in Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky":

'Twas brillig and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe.

The uses of figures of speech, metaphors, and similes that abound in literature can be of great interest to the young gifted child. The first awareness can well begin with lines from "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star":

Up above the world so high,
*Like a diamond* in the sky.

This simile can lead to imaginative discussion. What else do stars look like? What does a sunset look like? Does the sky look like a bowl? What other things look like the sky? The gifted child's ability to discover relationships will be challenged through such activities. Some poems are long metaphors. "The Moon's the North Wind's

Cooky" is one example. *Gilberto and the Wind* develops a feeling for metaphors.

As they study the various aspects of literature, children may begin to write spontaneously; or they may be preparing to write something in the future. A feeling for style, for variations of syntax, for words that dance, or gallop, or parade, or slink (but never plod) can only be developed in a child through study of the way in which authors have combined words to suit their purposes.

## Development of a Child's Potential

Through literature the gifted child can sample vicariously many different life patterns. He can live with Ken in *My Friend Flicka* or with Ralph in *Little Britches.* He can become aware of how each boy, living in a rural area, developed a relationship with his father. He can watch Ken change from a dreamer to a responsible, courageous boy. And if dreaminess is one of the gifted child's qualities, he can learn the difference between Ken's dream horse and the reality of Flicka. Or he can suffer with Ralph as the school bullies rough up the city boy, and he can discover how Ralph meets and solves his problem.

Each piece of literature reflects how the author sees the world through the eyes of a character. Through discussion the teacher can help gifted children understand how an author or a character feels about the world around him.

### Establishment of Values

During the early years in school, a child lays the foundations for his own set of values. Through the study of literature, he can compare the values of characters he admires with those of less successful characters. Fables, fairy tales, fantasies, and more realistic works can have a great influence on a gifted child. Many tales recount the good results of developing and using one's talents to the best advantage and the bad results of a selfish, jealous action.

For instance, in *Snow White* the queen, who wanted to be the most beautiful woman in the world, became a very ugly and despicable witch because of her covetous ambitions.

Lois Lenski's regional books are designed to give children an insight into life patterns existing in different areas of the United States. By comparing their own environment with, for instance, that of Joanda in *Cotton in My Sack* (1949), gifted children can begin to understand that every product we take for granted results from the work of people who live in particular regions of the country and have many of the same problems most people have. The gifted child can develop a sense of kinship to the human race through the study of literature.



### Different Backgrounds

The child who comes from a limited background can be motivated through literature to use his abilities and develop his potential. The child from a comfortable environment gains greater understanding of the problems of others. Biographies of people like Helen Keller and George Washington Carver may help gifted children define personal goals and values.

## Integration of Content and Skills

The *English Language Framework for California Public Schools – Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* (1968) points out that unless an artificial separation is made, all the strands of the English program in the primary grades are so closely woven together as to be almost indistinguishable. Thus, listening skills are developed as the teacher reads a literary selection, speaking skills are encouraged through discussion, reading skills are motivated by good stories with great ideas, and a study of good writing is the best preparation a child can have for subsequent creative writing.

Because emphasis in the study of children's literature should be on ideas, the gifted child develops facility in comprehending ideas. As he explores, together with his teacher and the other children, the purpose and message of the author, he has an opportunity to develop his own guidelines.

## Suggestions for Teachers

To offer specific directions for the study of certain books would be to make this publication obsolete before it is issued. More than a thousand new books for children are published each year. Quality is improving all the time. Illustrators are becoming as important as authors in conveying ideas, and many author-illustrators are producing beautiful volumes that are destined to become classics.

No longer can a literature course of study be prescribed as it was during the long reign of McGuffey's Readers. Teachers should choose according to their own enthusiasms; children are motivated to read when their teachers are genuinely excited about books.

Even the criteria for selecting children's literature are being debated. Should realism be stressed, eliminating the wonderful fantasies that appeal to young children? Should philosophy be paramount, or should didactic qualities be paramount? Some prime considerations are author, purpose, subject, realism, style, format, illustrations, lasting value.

### Development of Skills

Skills that can be developed through the study of literature are *auding,* or reading "between the lines"; recognizing and identifying

the styles of favorite authors; recognizing and creating metaphors, similes, and other figures of speech; and selecting the best word to convey a special idea.

One technique for developing auding is to have the gifted pupil predict the outcome of the story and then have him check his prediction as he listens to the rest of the selection. The teacher can stop and let the children finish a line of a poem. The teacher should vary the volume of her voice or pause just before the climax to emphasize an important point.

Children can be encouraged to make inferences in order to "read between the lines." Teachers should encourage and elicit inferential responses. The style of authors should be discussed freely. Children begin to think about how an author achieves effects. As the children grow in understanding the elements of style, they develop styles of their own.

**Study Objectives**

The objectives of the study of literature by gifted children in grades one to three are to enable the gifted child to:

Identify and discuss ideas in the literature he has read
Select stories or poems by his favorite authors
Select reading material for enjoyment
Recognize characteristics of his favorite authors
Know interesting facts about favorite authors
Read silently for enjoyment
Read orally favorite selections for the enjoyment of others
Memorize favorite poems
Recognize the difference between a stereotype and a generalization
Retell a favorite story, using his own style
Recognize relationships between types of literature, such as talking animal stories, real animal stories, and nature poems
Increase his vocabulary so that he can express himself in the best possible words
Use literature as a time-space machine to give him vicarious experiences in other times and places
Enjoy the sensory impact of poetry
Compare family relationships in similar stories
Develop an understanding of human relations
Recognize fantasy
Recognize fact
Ask questions to clarify his concepts
Aud (listen perceptively) and respond
Discriminate and recognize sound patterns (alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyme, assonance, dissonance)
Develop adequate verbal messages
Recognize and discuss the style of his favorite authors

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